



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THREE BALLADS FROM NOVA SCOTIA

BY W. ROY MACKENZIE

LITTLE MATHA GROVE

THE following version of "Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard" (Child, No. 81) was derived from the recitations of four different persons. The basis of the text is a recitation by Mrs. Levi Langille of Marshville, Nova Scotia (A); and her part of the text includes stanzas 1-7, 10-17, and 21-22. Mrs. Langille's version was the first one procured, and the only one that was at all complete. The other three were obtained by reading her version to persons who had formerly sung the ballad, but no longer remembered it well, and could only change and supplement in places while having the first version read to them. The parts of the text denoted by B were supplied by Mrs. James Gammon of River John, Nova Scotia, and include stanzas 8-9, 18-20, and 23-24. The text, therefore, is made up as follows: 1-7, from A; 8-9, from B; 10-17, from A; 18-20, from B; 21-22, from A; 23-24, from B. The fragments furnished by John Langille of River John (C) and by Mrs. Jacob Langille of Marshville (D) are given only in the footnotes. Every word obtained from any of the reciters may thus be found either in the text or in the notes. A, B, C, and D were all collected by me during August and September, 1909.

- A. 1. 'T was on a day, a high holiday,  
The best day of the old year,  
When little Matha Grove he went to church  
The holy word to hear.
2. Some came in in diamonds of gold,  
And some came in in pearls,  
And among them all was little Matha Grove  
The handsomest of them all.
3. Lord Daniel's wife was standing by.  
On him she cast an eye,  
Saying, "You little Matha Grove, this very night  
I invite you to lie with me."
4. Lord Daniel is away to the New Castle  
King Henry for to see.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C remembered the full stanza: —

"Lord Daniel is away to the New Castle  
King Henry for to see,  
And this very night little Matha Grove  
Shall lie with his wedded lady."

. . . . .  
 . . . . .

5. So the little foot-page was standing by,  
 And he heard all that was said,  
 And he took to his heels to the river-side,  
 And he bended his breast and he swum.<sup>1</sup>

6. And when he came to Lord Daniel's bower,  
 He knockéd so hard at the ring.  
 There was none so ready as Lord Daniel  
 For to rise and let him in.

7. "What news, what news, my little foot-page,  
 Do you bring unto me?"  
 "This very night little Matha Grove  
 Is in bed with your wedded lady."

B. 8. "If this be true, be true unto me,  
 Be true you bring unto me,  
 I have an only daughter dear,  
 And your wedded lady she shall be.

9. "If this be a lie, a lie unto me,  
 A lie you bring unto me,  
 I 'll cause a gallows to be rigged,  
 And hangéd you shall be."<sup>2</sup>

A. 10. So he put the bugle to his mouth,  
 And he sounded loud and shrill:  
 "If there 's any man in bed with another man's wife,  
 It is time to be hastening away."

11. So Lord Daniel he ordered up all his men,  
 And he placed them in a row.

. . . . .  
 . . . . .

12. "What 's that, what 's that?" said little Matha Grove,  
 "For I know the sound so well.  
 It must be the sound of Lord Daniel's bugle,"

. . . . .

<sup>1</sup> D recognized this stanza as being made up of parts of two stanzas, as formerly sung. The first of the two stanzas she could not complete, but the second she completed as follows: —

So he took to his heels to the river-side,  
 And he bended his breast and he swum,  
 And when he came to the dry land  
 He took to his heels and he run.

<sup>2</sup> A omitted stanzas 8–9.

13. "Lie still, lie still, you little Matha Grove,  
And keep me from the cold.  
Its 's only my father's shepherd boy  
That's driving sheep down in the fold."

14. So they hustled and they tumbled till they both fell asleep,  
And nothing more did they hear,  
Till Lord Daniel stood by their bedside.<sup>1</sup>  
. . . . .

15. "How do you like my bed?" said he,  
"And how do you like my sheet?  
And how do you like my wedded lady  
That lies in your arms and sleeps?"

16. "Well do I like your bed," said he,  
"Well do I like your sheet.  
Better do I like your wedded lady,  
That lies in my arms and sleeps."

17. "Get up, get up, you little Matha Grove,  
And some of your clothes put on,  
That it can't be said after your death  
That I slew a naked man."<sup>2</sup>

B. 18.<sup>3</sup> "How can I get up," little Matha replied,  
"And fight you for my life,  
When you have two bright swords by your side,  
And I have ne'er a knife?"

19. "If I have two bright swords by my side,  
They cost me deep in purse,  
And you shall have the best of them,  
And I shall have the worst.

<sup>1</sup> B rendered the stanza thus: —

So they tossed and tumbled all that night,  
Till they both fell fast asleep.  
And they never knew another word  
Till Lord Arnold stood at their bed's feet.

<sup>2</sup> B: —

"That it can't be said when you are dead  
That I slew a naked man."

<sup>3</sup> The following three stanzas are represented in A thus: —

"How can I go and fight you  
When you have two bright swords lying down by your side.  
And I've got scarcely a knife?"  
  
"You shall have the very best one,  
And I shall have the worst,  
And you shall have the very first blow,  
And I shall have the next."

20. "And you shall have the very first blow,  
And I shall have the other.  
What more, then, could I do for you  
If you were my own born brother?"
- A. 21. The very first blow that Matha Grove struck  
He wounded Lord Daniel sore.  
The very first blow Lord Daniel struck,  
Little Matha could strike no more.
22. "So curséd be my hand!" said he,  
"And curséd be my bride!  
They have caused me to kill the handsomest man  
That ever trod England's ground."<sup>1</sup>
- B. 23. He took his lady by the hand,  
He led her through the plain,  
And he never spoke another word  
Till he split her head in twain.
24. He put his sword against the ground,  
The point against his heart,  
There never was three lovers  
That sooner did depart.<sup>2</sup>

## PRETTY POLLY

The following version of "Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight" (Child, No. 4, H) is made up chiefly of the versions of two reciters, though a third one comes in with variants on two of the stanzas. The basis of this version, as of "Little Matha Grove," is a recitation by Mrs. Levi Langille (A). The ballad, as given by Mrs. Langille, was very defective in parts; but when it was read to John Langille (B), who could not sing or repeat it on his own initiative, it stimulated his memory to the production of a large part of the ballad as he had formerly sung it. Ten out of the seventeen stanzas in the main text which follows were contributed by him, while the corresponding parts by Mrs. Langille, being less complete, are relegated to the footnotes. Finally, variants on two of the stanzas were given by David Rogers of River John (C). The text is made up as follows: 1-4, from B; 5-8, from A; 9, from B; 10-12, from A; 13-17, from B. The variants of C are given in the footnotes. Every word obtained from any of the reciters may

<sup>1</sup> C rendered the stanza thus:—

"Curséd be my wife!" said he,  
"And curséd be my hands!  
For I have slain the best-looking man  
That ever trod England's lands."

<sup>2</sup> A omitted stanzas 23-24.

be found in the text or notes. These collections were also made during August and September, 1909.

- B. 1. There was a lord in Ambertown,  
He courted a lady gay,  
And all he wanted of this pretty maid  
Was to take her life away.<sup>1</sup>
2. "Go get me some of your father's gold,  
And some of your mother's fee,  
And two of the best nags out of the stable,  
Where there stands thirty and three."
3. She went and got some of her father's gold,  
And some of her mother's fee,  
And two of the best nags out of the stable,  
Where there stood thirty and three.
4. She mounted on the milk-white steed,  
And he on the rambling gray,  
And they rode till they came to the salt sea-side,  
Three hours before it was day.
- A. 5. "Light off, light off, thy steed white milk,  
And deliver it unto me,  
For six pretty maids I have drowned here,  
And the seventh one thou shalt be.
6. "Take off, take off, thy bonny silk plaid,  
And deliver it unto me,  
Methinks they are too rich and too gay  
To rot in the salt, salt sea."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The first four stanzas, in which I follow B, are thus represented in A (which has no equivalent of stanza 3): —

There was a lord in Ambertown  
Courtied a lady fair,  
And all he wanted of this pretty fair maid  
Was to take her life away.

"Go get me some of your father's gold,  
And some of your mother's fees,  
And two of the best horses in your father's stall,  
Where there stands thirty and three."

So she mounted on her steed white milk,  
And he on his dappling gray,  
And they rode forward to the sea  
Two hours before it was day.

<sup>2</sup> B rendered this stanza thus: —

"Take off, take off, thy silken dress,  
Likewise thy golden stays.  
Methinks they are too rich and too gay  
To rot in the salt, salt seas."

7. "If I must take off my bonny silk plaid,  
Likewise my golden stays,  
You must turn your back around to me,  
And face yon willow-tree."
8. He turned himself around about  
To face yon willow-tree.  
She grasped him by the middle so tight,  
And she tumbled him in the sea.
- B. 9. "Lie there, lie there, you false-hearted man!  
Lie there instead of me!  
For six pretty maids thou hast drowned here.  
Go keep them company."
- A. 10. So he rolléd high and he rolléd low,  
Till he rolléd to the sea-side.  
"Stretch forth your hand, my pretty Polly,  
And I 'll make you my bride."
11. "Lie there, lie there, you false-hearted man!  
Lie there instead of me!  
For six pretty maids thou hast drowned here,  
But the seventh hath drowned thee."
12. She mounted on her steed white milk,  
And she led her dappling gray,  
And she rode forward to her father's door  
An hour before it was day.
- B. 13. The parrot being up so early in the morn,  
It unto Polly did say,  
"I was afraid that some ruffian  
Had led you astray."
14. The old man on his pillow did lie,  
He unto the parrot did say,  
"What ails you, what ails you, you pretty Poll parrot,  
You prattle so long before day?"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C rendered the stanza thus:—

The parrot was up in the window high,  
And heard what she did say.  
"Where have you been, my pretty Polly,  
That you 're out so long before day?"

<sup>2</sup> A rendered the stanza thus:—

The old man he, its being awoke,  
And he heard all that was said.  
"What were you prittling and prattling, my pretty Polly,  
And keeping me awake all night long?"

15. "The old cat was at my cage door,  
And I was afraid he was going to eat me,  
And I was calling for pretty Polly  
To go drive the old cat away."<sup>1</sup>
16. "Well turned, well turned, my pretty Poll parrot!  
Well turned, well turned !" said she.  
"Your cage it shall be of the glittering gold,  
And the doors of ivory.
17. "No tales, no tales, my pretty Poll parrot,  
No tales you will tell on me.  
Your cage it shall be of the glittering gold,  
And hung on yon willow-tree."<sup>2</sup>

#### SIX QUESTIONS

The following version of "Captain Wedderburn's Courtship" (Child, No. 46) was obtained from the singing and recitation of John Adamson, Millville, Nova Scotia.

1. The Duke of Merchant's daughter walked out one summer's day.  
She met a bold sea-captain by chance upon the way.  
He says, "My pretty fair maid, if it was n't for the law,  
I would have you in my bed this night by either stock or wa'."
2. She sighed and said, "Young man, oh, do not me perplex.  
.  
.  
.  
You must answer me in questions six before that I gang awa',  
Or before that I lie in your bed by either stock or wa'—
3. "Oh, what is rounder than your ring? What's higher than the trees?  
Or what is worse than women's tongue? What's deeper than the  
seas?

<sup>1</sup> A and C each had a separate version of this stanza. A's version is:—

"The old cat had got up to my littock so high,  
And I was afraid she was going to eat me,  
And I was calling for pretty Polly  
To go drive the old cat away."

C's version runs thus:—

"The old cat was at my cage door,  
And swore she would devour me,  
And I was calling for fair MacConnel  
To hiss the cat away."

C supposed that the "fair MacConnel" was a servant.

<sup>2</sup> These two concluding stanzas are represented, in A's version, by the one stanza:—

"Don't prittle, don't prattle, my pretty Polly,  
Nor tell any tales on me.  
Your cage shall be made of the glittering gold  
Instead of the greenwood tree."



What bird sings first, what bird sings last? Or where does the dew first fall? —

Before that I lie in your bed by either stock or wall.”

4. “The globe is rounder than your ring. Sky’s higher than the trees.  
The devil’s worse than women’s tongue. Hell’s deeper than the seas.  
The roe sings first, the *thirst* sings last. On the earth the dew first falls,  
Before that I lie in your bed by either stock or wall.”<sup>1</sup>
5. “You must get for me some winter fruit which in December grew.  
You must get for me a silken cloak that ne’er a waft went through,  
A sparrow’s thorn, a priest new-born, before that I gang awa’,  
Before that I lie in your bed by either stock or wa’.”
6. “My father’s got some winter fruit which in December grew.  
My mother’s got a silken cloak that ne’er a waft went through.  
Sparrows’ thorns they’re easy found. There’s one on every claw.  
So you and I lie in one bed, and you lie next the wa’.”
7. “You must get for my wedding supper a chicken without a bone.  
You must get for my wedding supper a cherry without a stone.  
You must get for me a gentle bird, a bird without a gall,  
Before that I lie in your bed by either stock or wall.”
8. “Oh, when the chicken’s in the egg, I’m sure it has no bone.  
And when the cherry’s in full bloom, I’m sure it has no stone.  
The dove it is a gentle bird. It flies without a gall,  
Before that I lie in your bed, by either stock or wall.”
9. He took her by the lily-white hand and led her through the hall.  
He held her by the slender waist for fear that she would fall.  
He led her on his bed of down without a doubt at all,  
So he and she lies in one bed, and he lies next the wall.

The Mrs. Levi Langille, who appears as the most important reciter of “Little Matha Grove” and of “Pretty Polly,” is a first-cousin of the unhappily defunct “Ned” Langille, whom I mentioned in my short article on “Ballad-Singing in Nova Scotia” (*Journal of American Folk-Lore*, July–Sept., 1909). She belongs, therefore, to the family that (in the district under discussion) has been chiefly instrumental in carrying down such relics of the old ballads as survived the general wave of neglect and disapproval. The king of ballad-singers in that region was the father of “Ned,” above mentioned; and his brother

<sup>1</sup> This line of course should be —

“So you and I lie in one bed, and you lie next the wall.”

The singer here, as in many other cases, uses the regular refrain without being troubled by its lack of appropriateness.

George, only a less gifted singer than himself, was the father of Mrs. Levi Langille, who is now about seventy years of age. Old George himself died as recently as the summer of 1908, at the ripe age of ninety-three, and his daughter assured me that he could have sung many of "the old songs" to me within a month of his death; but he, like many other old-time singers whom I have lately heard about, died too soon.

Mrs. Langille herself did not have any particular regard for the two old ballads presented above. Like all her family, she has a strong taste for music, and of late years her musical interests have turned to the songs that her children have brought home from country singing-schools, where, of course, the ancient ballad is no longer regarded. When she was younger, her ideals of secular music did not extend far beyond the ballads which formed the stock-in-trade of her father's repertory. But old George did not sing his ballads every day in the week, nor to every chance comer. He was, according to his daughter's account, "a proud man," who sang only upon special occasions or as a special reward for favors received. One of the forms that his "pride" assumed was an eager desire that his hair should retain its pristine black, and on regular occasions he instructed his daughter to take her station beside his chair and pluck out the ever-recurring white threads. In payment for this service, and while the gleaning operation was in progress, he sang her favorite songs by way of recompense. It was in this way that she learned "Little Matha Grove" and "Pretty Polly."

Before going on to the other persons who had knowledge of these songs, I must mention that the title "Pretty Polly" is of very doubtful authenticity in connection with the ballad to which it refers above. Mrs. Langille mentioned this as the name before she sang the ballad; but when I questioned her afterwards, she asserted that there was no special name for the song, and concluded with the familiar suggestion, "Make up a name for it yourself. You have more larnin' than we have." The two persons whom I discovered afterwards who had some knowledge of the ballad could not remember any particular title as applied to it, and they took refuge, also, in an appeal to my superior scholarship.

I shall now indicate, as briefly as possible, the further information that I obtained about "Little Matha Grove." A couple of weeks after Mrs. Langille's recitation, I discovered that another woman, Mrs. James Gammon, living five or six miles from Mrs. Langille, had been known to sing the ballad years ago. On questioning her, I found that she could repeat only a stray stanza or two. She explained that she had learned this, among other ballads, when a girl, from her aunt, but that after her marriage her husband had implored her to give up sing-

ing these "rowdy songs." She had complied, in the interests of respectability, and consequently retained only dim recollections of the old ballads. However, when I read Mrs. Langille's version to her, she recalled a good many stanzas, some of which had not appeared in the first version. Finally, I made a canvass of Mrs. Langille's relatives, and found two persons who were able to make slight contributions, though they had not heard the ballad sung for years. John Langille, a grandson of "Old Ned's," remembered a few lines from having heard his grandfather sing the ballad; and Mrs. Jacob Langille, a cousin of Mrs. Levi's, having been brought up by "Old Ned's" father, completed one defective verse from her recollections of the old man's singing.

The so-called "Pretty Polly" was not quite so widely known. After having procured Mrs. Langille's version, I found only one person who had any distinct recollections of the song. This was the John Langille referred to above. He had learned it, years before, from his grandfather, "Old Ned," and, happily, he "used to roar this one a little himself;" so, when I stimulated his memory by reading Mrs. Langille's version to him, he repeated the greater part of the ballad, adding a good deal to the first version. In my footnotes to the above text I include also variants on two of the stanzas, which were supplied by David Rogers, an old resident of River John, who is now living in Pictou, about twenty miles away. David made up for his slim knowledge of the ballad by an earnest assurance that whatever he supplied was sure to be right.

The story of the third ballad, "Six Questions," is much less involved. John Adamson, an old lumberman of Millsville, recited it to me after he had first sung it through in compliance with the demands of convention and of necessity. He had got the ballad, years ago, from his wife, and his wife had got it "from a friend." Beyond this — and even here — the "Six Questions," as a matter of Nova Scotia tradition, fades into the mist.

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY,  
ST. LOUIS, MO.